

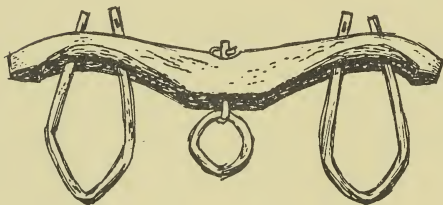
973.7L63
C2C677t

Coleman, D. M. (Mrs.
C. H. Coleman)

Thomas Lincoln: the Father
of Abraham Lincoln.

LINCOLN ROOM

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
LIBRARY



MEMORIAL

the Class of 1901

founded by

HARLAN HOYT HORNER

and


HENRIETTA CALHOUN HORNER

Thomas Lincoln

The Father of Abraham Lincoln

by D. M. COLEMAN

Copyright 1956 by D. M. Coleman



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

(This short life of Thomas Lincoln is based on a manuscript by Dr. Charles H. Coleman, of Eastern State College, Charleston, Illinois, who is writing the definitive life of Thomas Lincoln.)

The Father of Abraham Lincoln:

A statue of History in front of the Archives Building in Washington, D. C., bears the inscription: "The past is prologue"; and a study of Abraham Lincoln's ancestry, and particularly of his father's life, is rewarding to those who wonder what forces, what influences shaped this truly great man—the sixteenth president of the United States.

In most of the biographies of Abraham, Thomas Lincoln, the father, and his ancestors have borne the burden of Abraham Lincoln's lack of formal education and of economic and cultural opportunities in his youth. Thomas has, variously, been called "shiftless", "poor white trash", and "ignorant". Yet an examination of the records remaining of his life show that, from manhood on, he was a responsible citizen who paid his debts and his taxes and enjoyed the respect of his neighbors and the affection of his family and friends.

Abraham Lincoln, himself, had a distorted picture of his father and of his father's family. He told a would-be biographer in 1860:

It's a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of me or my early life. It can all be condensed in a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's *Elegy*: 'the short and simple annals of the poor.'

Abraham Lincoln also wrote at one time:

My father, Thomas Lincoln, by the early death of his father, and the very narrow circumstances of his mother, even in childhood was a wandering, laboring boy, and grew up literally without education.

William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, in his **True Story of a Great Life**, published in 1889, painted a lurid picture of Lincoln's background; but it remained for Woodrow Wilson to write the most damning, and certainly the most unjustified, description of Lincoln's family background in his book **Division and Reunion**, published in 1893:

Abraham Lincoln came of the most unpromising stock on the continent, the 'poor white trash' of the South. His shiftless father moved from place to place in the western country, failing where everybody else was successful in making a living; and the boy spent the most susceptible years of his life under no discipline but that of degrading poverty.

Thomas Lincoln was a man of modest attainments and modest ambition. As he

followed the advancing frontier, he was one of the thousands of "unexceptional pioneers" who contributed so much to the making of our nation, a nation his son was destined to save from disruption.

But let's start at the beginning.

Ancestry of Thomas Lincoln

The name Lincoln is very old, going back to the days of the Roman occupation of Britain, according to A. J. Beveridge. Lindum was a Roman colony established about 86 A.D. Lindum-colonia, Lindum-colony, Lincolon, came in time by successive modifications to Lindcoln, and finally to Lincoln (always preserving the silent letter "l" that shows its Roman origin). It was the name of a place first, and then afterwards the name of persons residing or born in that place.

We can trace back in England four generations of Lincolns before the Samuel Lincoln who emigrated to Salem, Massachusetts, in 1637, and who is the direct ancestor of the sixteenth President of the United States: Abraham Lincoln. Our Lincolns, the ancestors of those who came to America, came from Norfolk County in England.

First, there was a Robert Lincoln,
who lived and died (1543) in
Hingham, Norfolk, England;
Then there was his son Robert, who

died in 1556 in Hingham;
Then his son Richard who died in
1620 in Hingham;
Then his son Edward (the father
of Samuel) who died in 1640 in
Hingham.

The story of why Samuel Lincoln came to the New World is an interesting one. Richard Lincoln, his grandfather, was married four times. His fourth marriage at an advanced age to a woman younger than himself resulted in his cutting off his oldest son (Edward by his first wife) with a very small amount of property, and giving the largest part of his estate to the fourth wife's children. The children of the oldest son, therefore, were practically landless; and so Samuel, one of Edward's children, emigrated to America to make his fortune. He sailed at the age of 18 years as a weaver's apprentice to one Francis Lawes who, with his wife Lydia and daughter Mary and maid Anne Smith **and** Samuel Lincoln, arrived in Salem, Massachusetts, in June of 1637.

Samuel Lincoln soon moved to Hingham, Massachusetts, apparently having worked out his apprenticeship. He married one Martha Lewis (?), and they had eleven children. The direct ancestor of Thomas Lincoln and of his son Abraham Lincoln was the fourth child of Samuel Lincoln: Mordecai. Mordecai married Sarah, daughter of Abraham Jones, and had four children by

her, the first son Mordecai being the ancestor of Thomas Lincoln. Their second son they named Abraham, and this is the first time the name "Abraham" appears in the Lincoln lineage.

The pioneer instinct prevailed in this family. Of the seven Lincolns in direct line from the original immigrant Samuel to Abraham, the President, not one died in the community in which he was born: Mordecai Lincoln (son of the original immigrant Samuel) died in Scituate, Massachusetts, in 1727; his son Mordecai, born in Scituate, died in Berks County, Pennsylvania, in 1736; his son John was born in Freehold, New Jersey, and died in Virginia, in 1788; his son Abraham (the father of our Thomas Lincoln and who was always called "Captain" Abraham presumably because of his rank in the militia service) probably was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania, and died in Kentucky in 1786.

And so we come to Thomas, who was born in Virginia on Linville Creek in what was soon to become Rockingham County, in January, 1778, the fourth child of "Captain" Abraham and Bathsheba Lincoln. The next time you are driving through the lovely Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, on state route No. 42, go into the Linville Creek neighborhood of Rockingham County, and ask to be shown the handsome brick house of Jacob Lincoln (brother of

"Captain" Abraham). Jacob Lincoln's house has ten rooms and, despite its age of a century and a half, is still one of the most substantial and beautiful homes in that area. It doesn't bear out the "poverty stricken" theme of the President's immediate relatives.

Thomas' Life in Virginia and Kentucky

At the time of Thomas' birth, his thirty-four year old father owned 415 acres of rich Shenandoah Valley farm land. His mother, Bathsheba, was the daughter of Alexander Herring, a prosperous farmer of the neighborhood. The Lincolns and the Herrings were not Tidewater aristocrats; rather they were Valley farmers, independent, hard working, and prosperous.

Thomas Lincoln was four years old in 1782. That was the time of the family's great migration to Kentucky. They traveled in wagons southwest from Linville Creek for 250 miles. Then at the Block House, a point seven miles east of the beginning of the Wilderness Road (near the city of Gate City, Virginia today), it is probable that they swapped their wagons for the pack horses of some east bound party just arriving from over the Wilderness Road. The Wilderness Road was then only a trail leading into Kentucky, one of the numberless well trodden paths crisscrossing the country that had been made by the Indians.

The Wilderness trail had been straightened out to some extent in 1775 by Daniel Boone and a group of axemen in the pay of Richard Henderson, one of the great colonizers of Kentucky. However, it would still only take single file travel in 1782.

Why "Captain" Abraham picked out this time to go into Kentucky is a question indeed. Indian attacks on the Wilderness Road in the 1780's were not just a vague hazard; they were an ever present danger. In 1784, two years after the migration of the Lincolns, over one hundred travelers on the Wilderness Road were murdered by Indians. Not only did there exist the Indians' burning indignation with the white men who were taking over their land and pushing them farther back all the time, but the British Colonel Hamilton from his headquarters in Detroit, fighting the settlers in our Revolutionary War, had enlisted the Indians' aid, promising them that, if they frightened the white Americans out of the west, they could have it all to themselves. The British furnished firearms to the Indians. The last battle of the American Revolution was fought at Blue Licks, Kentucky, August 19, 1782, between the Kentucky settlers and the British and Indians. Why **did** "Captain" Abraham pick out this unsettled and fearful time to start for the west? To four year old Thomas the trip must have been

a tremendous adventure. To the adults, who knew of the Indian threat and the hardships facing the pioneer, a period of great soul searching must have prefaced their decision to make the attempt.

When "Captain" Abraham and Bathsheba Lincoln came to Kentucky in 1782, he already had 1200 acres of Kentucky land, much of it in the fertile "Blue Grass" section of central Kentucky. He had acquired this on a previous trip, made alone, before the family migration.

The Lincolns, having successfully passed over the Wilderness Road, lived on two pioneer farms in Kentucky; at first on 800 acres on the Green River in Lincoln County and then on 400 acres on Long Run in Jefferson County. "Captain" Abraham and the older sons felled trees, cleared fields, and planted and harvested corn, hemp, flax, and other crops. Always present was the danger from Indians: roving war parties or lurking assassins. A document in the Durrett Collection at the University of Chicago contains a list of subscribers to an Indian scalp fund in Jefferson County, and reads as follows:

We, the subscribers, promise to pay the sum annexed to our respective names for every Indian scalp taken in the County of Jefferson on the west of the main road leading from Louisville to Sheppardsville, within six months from date.

There follows a list of names with amounts ranging from three pounds down. Some are marked paid!

During 1782 "Captain" Abraham bought about 2800 more acres of land, some of it on the Green River and some of it on the Licking River.

Tragedy struck the family in 1786. They had moved to a pioneer fort called Hughes Station, close to the Long Run farm (now near present day Louisville). One day in May, 1786, "Captain" Abraham was working in his field with his three sons. An Indian shot the father dead from ambush, and then started towards little Tommy. Thirteen year old Josiah rushed to the fort for help, but fifteen year old Mordecai ran to the unfinished cabin for his gun and killed the Indian, avenging his father and saving his brother Thomas.

This family tragedy was probably the reason for the widow Bathsheba moving with her five children to the safer and more settled neighborhood of Washington County, Kentucky, soon thereafter. Thomas lived with his mother on Beech Fork in Washington County until he was 18 years old, probably working for farmers in the neighborhood and undoubtedly learning his trade as a carpenter in Richard Berry's blacksmith and carpenter shop. The records show that Mordecai, as oldest son and heir, sold the Long Run farm in 1797 and the Licking

River farm in 1808. The final disposition of the other land has not been determined. Thomas Lincoln's name appears in the Washington County tax list of June 24, 1795, as a male between 16 and 21 years of age and without taxable property. When he was 17 (1795) he served in the Washington County militia for sixty days, his first recorded public service.

Thomas lived with his father's cousin, Hannaniah Lincoln, at Elizabethtown in Hardin County, Kentucky, from May, 1796, until at least in September of 1797, working as a laborer for Samuel Haycraft and perhaps other men. He spent the year 1798 with his uncle, Isaac Lincoln, on the Wautauga in eastern Tennessee. Then he returned to his mother's home in Washington County, Kentucky, where he lived (according to the tax lists) from 1799 to 1802. When he was 24 years of age he moved to Hardin County in Kentucky. It was these years—from 1795 to 1803—that earned him his son Abraham's description of "a wandering laboring boy."

Thomas Lincoln lived in Hardin County from 1802 to 1816. He seems to have found himself there. During this time he purchased three farms in Hardin County and two city lots in Elizabethtown. On June 12, 1806, he married his first wife, Nancy Hanks, by whom he had three children, the second of whom became the sixteenth

President of the United States.

Thomas Lincoln met Nancy Hanks when she was living with her aunt and uncle, Elizabeth and Thomas Sparrow, in Hardin County. Nancy, 22 years of age, tall, well proportioned, had dark skin and eyes, a high forehead, a good command of language. She was a skilled seamstress and, when there was a wedding or a funeral, might be engaged in a home for a week or two at a time. Working for wages in families that were growing rich, she was not regarded as a servant but sat at table with the family. Thomas at this time was 26 years of age, of medium height and solidly built. His hair was such a dark shade of brown that it looked black, and he wore it cut straight around on a level with the bottom of his ears, not shingled up the back. His gray eyes twinkled. Nancy had been born in Virginia, but her mother and her mother's family had moved to Kentucky when she was a small child. The courtship of Tom and Nancy progressed in a satisfactory way and, when she went to Washington County to do some sewing for her friend Polly Berry, Tom found it necessary to visit his two brothers still living in that county. The Richard Berrys offered their house for the wedding, and so it was held there—rather than in Hardin County where Nancy had been living with her relatives.

The Reverend Jesse Head married Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. It was a grand wedding. The Berrys were well to do; there was no lack of help nor of guests; nor was the wedding feast a matter of light refreshments; it was a splendid barbecue. And they went to live in Elizabethtown, county seat of Hardin County.

Thomas served the public while living in Hardin County in various ways; he guarded prisoners, in one instance putting in six days of guard duty for which he received one pound seven shillings. Jury duty then was limited to land owners, and Thomas was given jury duty almost as soon as he made his first purchase of land. He also received an appointment as a "patroller" of Hardin County roads; this entailed guarding the peaceful traveler against highwaymen and thugs, and making certain that all slaves using the roads had the express permission of their masters. He also was appointed by the court as one of four appraisers of the property of a neighbor who had died. He also was named road surveyor, a duty similar to that of our present day township road commissioner.

In summary, he served in a public capacity on seventeen occasions during the fourteen years of his continuous residence in Hardin County, all appointive assignments. His public duties were not

those requiring a man of much schooling, but they did call for a man of honesty and reliability, a man well regarded in his community.

Thomas never was a large scale land owner. However, the Hardin County tax list for 1814 showed Lincoln with property assessed for taxation valued at \$510. This ranked him as 15th in property value for tax purposes among the 98 taxpayers listed. Most significant is the fact that Thomas Lincoln's name never appeared on any list of delinquent tax payers.

In the spring of 1806, just before he was married to Nancy Hanks, Thomas Lincoln made a business trip with Isaac Bush (the son of a well to do landowner and leading citizen of E-town). They took a flatboat loaded with produce owned by the Bleakley and Montgomery store in Elizabethtown down the Mississippi, to be sold in New Orleans on commission. His commission amounted to sixteen pounds and ten shillings, which was credited to his account at the store. At the same time he was credited with nearly fourteen pounds in gold, from which it would appear that he did some trading on his own account. Maybe some part of the flatboat cargo was farm produce raised on his Mill Creek farm.

The Thomas Lincolns had three children born in Kentucky: Sarah in 1807 in Elizabethtown, Abraham in February, 1809, on

the Sinking Spring farm to which they moved probably in December of 1808, and Tommy, born in 1811, who died in infancy. The cabin on this farm in which Abraham Lincoln was born has been preserved in a marble building, and tourists from all over the world make the pilgrimage to his birthplace near Hodgenville, Kentucky.

Thomas joined the Little Mount Separate Baptist Church in Hardin County, Kentucky in 1816, the year the family moved to Indiana. This church was anti-slavery. This suggests that Thomas was opposed to slavery, and perhaps is the basis of Abraham Lincoln's statement that his father moved to Indiana "partly on account of slavery". President Lincoln's statement in 1864 that "if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think and feel" leads us to conclude that the atmosphere of his childhood home in Kentucky had been critical of slavery.

Difficulty with Kentucky land titles, however, was the chief cause for the move to Indiana in December, 1816. A surveyor's error cost Thomas 38 acres (and 18 pounds) when he sold his Mill Creek farm in 1814. His title to his 300 acre Sinking Spring farm was defective, and he lost the land—although the court did order Isaac Bush, who sold it to him, to refund the \$200 purchase price. His Knob Creek farm,

shown as 30 acres on the 1815 tax list giving Thomas Lincoln as the owner, also was the subject of litigation which was still unsettled when the discouraged Thomas left for Indiana. There is no record of any suits involving titles to the land which he purchased in Indiana and in Illinois, so he did get away from this irritation.

Life In Indiana

In the autumn of 1816 Thomas made a trip to Indiana to select a home place for his family. The Lincoln family reached the Indiana land that Thomas had picked out on Pigeon Creek in December, 1816; but it was not until the following October, 1817, that he went to the land office in Vincennes and "entered" 160 acres, and made a down payment. In other words, he "squatted" on the land for nine months. He entered this land under the terms of the public land law of 1804 which fixed a price of \$2.00 per acre and a minimum entry of 160 acres, with a provision for credit. Lincoln finally kept only 80 acres of this land, and completed his payment of \$160 in 1827. He was allowed to reduce the amount of land to 80 acres under the terms of the federal public land "relief" act of 1821.

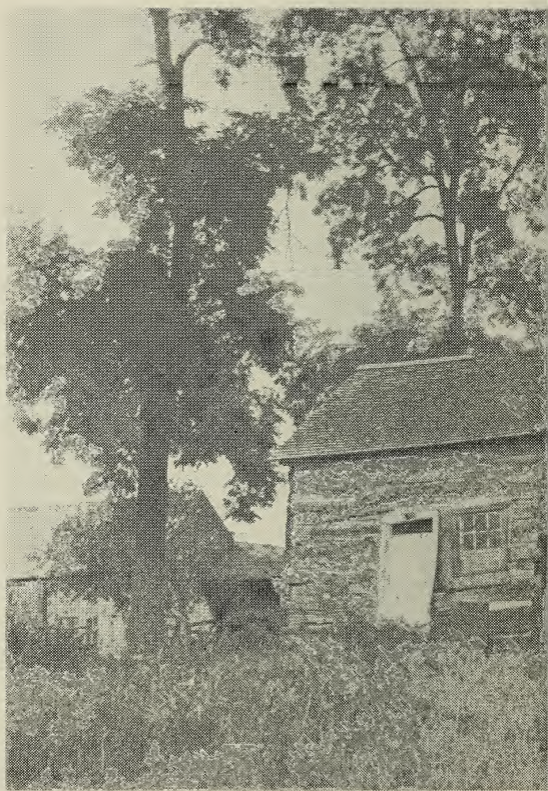
A. J. Beveridge in his **Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858** says of the new land to which Thomas brought his family:

Indiana is a vast forest . . . just penetrated in places by backwoods settlers who are half hunters, half farmers. . . . Fewer people had penetrated this section than any other part of the southern quarter of the new State — hardly more than one adult white man to every four square miles and, counting women and children and youths under twenty-one, a little over one human being to each square mile . . . Upon a knoll surrounded by marshy land . . . he decided to start life anew.

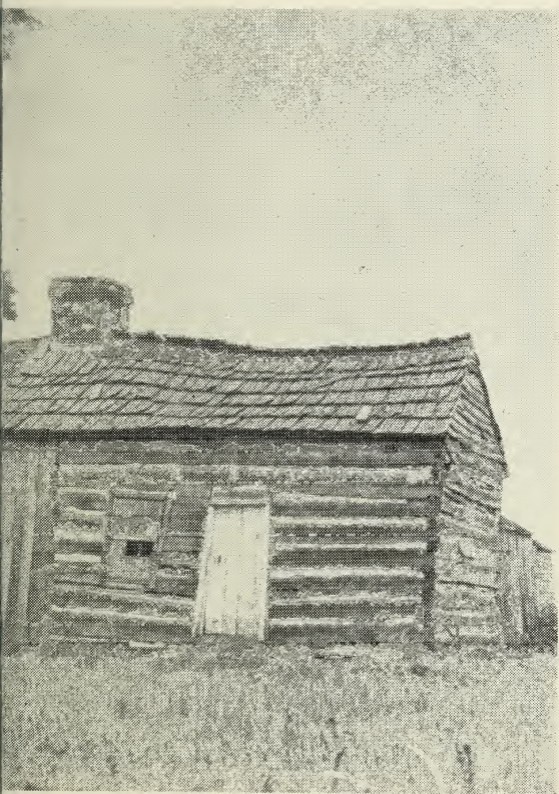
Nancy Hanks Lincoln died in their Spencer County home in Indiana on October 5, 1818, a victim of the dread "milk sick" that ravaged the Pigeon Creek neighborhood. Cows ate the foliage of the poisonous white snake root weed, and those who drank their milk contracted the "milk sick". When Nancy died, Sarah was 11 and Abraham was 9 years old. Just before Nancy died, her uncle and aunt, Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, who had raised her and who had followed the Thomas Lincolns to Indiana, also died from the same dread disease. In the fourteen months that followed Nancy's death, Thomas, Dennis Hanks (Nancy's cousin who lived with them) and the two children must have had a rugged time. Little Sarah did the cooking. The food of the pioneers was mostly flesh with some corn or wheat broken in stump mortars; (tree stumps were used for this purpose.) The cooking

was poor, frying in grease being the favorite method. The clothing of the four of them must have been in a bad way with no feminine hand to clean, patch or renew it.

Pioneer widows and widowers remarried promptly, especially those who had small children. In the society of the time a man was needed to protect as well as support the family, but a woman was needed to keep the family together and make a home of a pioneer cabin. So Thomas went back to Elizabethtown in December, 1819, and married a former friend of his—Mrs. Sarah Bush Johnston. Sarah had been a widow for three years, and had three children: Elizabeth aged 12, Matilda aged 10, and John aged 9 years. Tom paid off her debts; and brought her and the children back to Pigeon Creek with all her belongings in a borrowed wagon. At the time of her marriage, Sarah Johnston was a very tall, strong woman, straight as an Indian, with pink cheeks, steady gray-blue eyes, and a very kindly expression. The new mother was blessed with energy and sense; she was a good housekeeper with a passion for cleanliness. The children were washed and combed and mended; the whole place was cleaned up; the fire-place and the furniture were overhauled. The change was so pronounced that, nearly thirty-five years afterward, Abraham remembered and described it.



The original Goosenest Prairie cabin of 1892.



Thomas and Sarah Lincoln. Moved to Chicago in

Sarah proved an affectionate mother to all five children. Abraham was devoted to his stepmother. He told Harriet Hanks' husband, A. H. Chapman, in later years, that she had always encouraged him, that she had been his best friend in this world, and that no son could love a mother more than he loved her. Mrs. Lincoln, on her part, declared: "Abe was a good boy, and I can say what scarcely one woman, a mother, can say in a thousand . . . Abe never gave me a cross word or look . . . His mind and mine, what little I had, seemed to run together—move in the same channel".

The "Regular Baptists at Pigeon Creek" had organized in 1816, but their church building was not started until 1820. Local tradition has it that Thomas assisted in the building of the church and that the pulpit is his handiwork, all of which is reasonable enough since Thomas was a carpenter. He got a letter from his "Little Mount Separate Baptist Church" of Kentucky, and joined the "Regular Baptists" in 1823. Although Tom joined the congregation by letter, his second wife Sarah had joined by "experience" which meant that she was a convert. Thomas took a very active part in church affairs which we may trace through entries in the Minute Book of Pigeon Creek Church (now in the State Historical Library at Springfield, Illinois). He served as a dele-

gate to a church conference, and on several occasions was appointed to the church discipline committee. He became a trustee. The minute book shows that in 1827 he pledged 24 pounds of cornmeal to the church. When they moved to Illinois in the winter of 1829-1830, he asked for a letter of "dismission" for himself and wife, which he probably used in Coles County, Illinois.

In Coles County, Illinois, Thomas and his wife attended a church of the Disciples of Christ, possibly because there was no Baptist congregation in their neighborhood. Regardless of the particular denomination that Thomas favored, it is clear that his son Abraham was reared in a Christian home. Dennis Hanks said that Thomas Lincoln acquired a family Bible early in their Indiana residence. The family record taken from this Bible is now in the Illinois State Historical Library. We also know that a beautiful grace was said at every meal in their home: "Fit and prepare us for life's humblest service, for Christ's sake, Amen".

By 1824 Lincoln and Hanks had cleared enough land so that they had about 10 acres of corn, 5 acres of wheat, 2 acres of oats, and one acre of meadow. They raised sheep and cattle, but realized very little on them. Cows and calves were worth only six dollars, corn ten cents, wheat 25 cents at the time. Abraham worked for other farmers to help augment the family income.

In January, 1828, Thomas' only daughter Sarah, who had married Aaron Grigsby in 1826, died in childbirth. The Grigsbys, according to Beveridge, were of the aristocracy of the backwoods. Abraham Lincoln, however, blamed his sister's death on neglect by the Grigsby family, and hard feelings prevailed between the two families.

There is no record of any public service performed by Thomas during his stay in Indiana. Rockport, the county seat of Spencer County, Indiana, was 19 miles from the Lincoln farm, and probably Thomas was not as well known there as he had been in the county seat at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and vicinity, where he had spent a good part of his young life.

Abraham Lincoln, Thomas' son, grew up and matured in Indiana. He was seven years old in 1816 when they reached Pigeon Creek, and 21 years of age when they left Indiana. Beveridge paints a vivid picture of pioneer life in Indiana. He says the people were very ignorant, rough mannered, and superstitious. The cabins of these wood folk were often ill-kept, dirty in the extreme, infested with vermin. There was no sanitation; bathing or washing the body in any way was seldom attempted—except, of course, during "swimming time". It is hard to see how, from December to March, the clothes they wore could have been washed. A well educated and care-

fully reared New England woman came to live in Indiana in 1822. She records that she couldn't wash clothes oftener than every three months. The cabins were packed with people: husband, wife, children, guests, relatives and hired men all lived in a single room, cooking, eating, sleeping there. Sometimes a loft relieved the congestion. False shame or delicacy did not exist. Incredible quantities of whiskey were consumed, everybody (including women and preachers) drinking the fiery liquid. Whiskey, as well as bread and meat, was a common necessity. All used tobacco—chewing, smoking, snuffing; and corn cob pipes in the mouths of women was a not uncommon sight. Fighting and profanity were general.

And A b r a h a m Lincoln's formative years were spent in this environment. Some of it stuck to him, but not all. He didn't like hunting and fishing; he didn't really like to work. It has been reported that he said his father taught him to work, but never to like it. He always wanted to read. He would walk miles to get a book, and he always wanted to talk about what he had read. He began to make speeches as early as his fifteenth year, to anyone who would listen. He seldom touched liquor in an age where everybody drank too much. He never fell into the habit of profanity, though as an adult he had a great reputa-

tion for his "off color" stories.

Abe's formal schooling, totaling less than one year, amounted to a few weeks in 1815 and another short term in 1816 in Kentucky. In Indiana there was a subscription school opened in 1820 by one Andrew Crawford, and Abe attended this as well as two other schools in the neighborhood in 1824 and 1826. His stepsister, Matilda Johnston, and his cousin Dennis Hanks agreed that Abe liked learning much more than physical labor: "active and persistent in learning; read everything he could; ciphered on boards, on the walls". Abraham Lincoln, himself, told a friend in 1853:

My father had suffered greatly for the want of an education, and he determined at an early day that I should be well educated. And what do you think he said his ideas of a good education were? We had an old dog-eared arithmetic in our house, and Father determined that somehow, or somehow else, I should cipher clear through that book.

His stepmother said in 1865:

As a usual thing Mr. Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it. He would do it himself first . . . he wanted, as he himself felt the uses and necessities of education, his boy Abraham to learn; and he encouraged him to do it in all ways he could.

Beveridge says that Abe haunted the law courts of his neighborhood, and borrowed books from the various lawyers of his acquaintance. Business before the courts at the county seat consisted mostly of criminal and divorce cases: stealing of log chains, hog stealing, slander, assault, libel, murder, malpractice, but not many cases of debt. Lincoln listened to this, took it all in.

The family moves to Illinois

In the autumn of 1829, Thomas Lincoln resolved to leave Indiana for Illinois. Dennis Hanks' cousin, John Hanks, had gone to Macon County, Illinois, and sent back the usual glowing reports of the new country. Also in Indiana the "milk sick" threatened again. So Thomas and Sarah Lincoln went to Elizabethtown, Kentucky, and sold Sarah's lot for \$123.00. Tom then sold his 80 acres in Indiana to his neighbor Charles Grigsby for \$125.00, his corn at ten cents a bushel, and his hogs to another neighbor. The party which left on March first of 1830 consisted of

Thomas Lincoln, aged 52

Abraham Lincoln, aged 21, the one
remaining child of Nancy Lin-
coln

Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln, aged
41, Thomas' second wife and
Abe's stepmother

Sarah's daughter Sarah Elizabeth

Hanks, aged 22, who had married

Dennis Hanks, aged 31, in 1821; and their four children

Sarah Jane, aged 8

John Talbot, aged 7

Nancy, aged 6

Harriet, aged 4

Another daughter of Sarah's, Matilda Hall, aged 20, who had married Squire Hall, aged about 25 (he was half brother of Dennis Hanks) and their baby son John, aged 11 months

Sarah's youngest child, John D. Johnston, then aged 19

a total of 13 persons. Through the forest they made their way to Vincennes, Indiana. Their crossing of the Wabash River is now commemorated by a beautiful bronze and marble plaque on the Illinois side of the river. They pushed on towards their destination which was a farm on the Sangamon River in Macon County, near the present city of Decatur. The ground hadn't thawed out yet so the ox teams were able to make better time than would have been possible a few weeks later. The trip took about two weeks. It is tradition that they stopped in Coles County, Illinois, to see relatives (the Radleys and the Sawyers) on their way to Macon County.

Thomas Lincoln arrived in Illinois with a wagon, a team of oxen, a horse, a minimum amount of furniture—which included three beds, bedding, one bureau, one

table, one clothes closet, one set of chairs, a few cooking utensils, an axe, a rifle. Beveridge says that the furniture list is almost the same as that which Mrs. Sarah Bush Johnston brought to Indiana on the occasion of her marriage to Thomas. He had some cash left from the sale of the two pieces of property, after the purchase of the wagon and the oxen and the supplies for the trip.

Bad luck stalked the Thomas Lincoln party. "Ague" and fever or malaria was a common affliction of early settlers in Illinois, and the Lincoln-Hanks-Hall families suffered from it in the fall of 1830. However, fifteen acres were broken, and Abraham helped cut trees and split rails to fence it. This was followed by an unusually severe winter, long remembered as the "winter of the deep snow". Beveridge talks of the "thick white smother" that during the winter of 1830-1831 concealed all Illinois. It started to snow on Christmas Day, and fell steadily during most of the winter. Nobody ventured beyond their cabin except for firewood. The snow drifted to 15 feet on the prairie. The cold was intense, often ten to twenty degrees below zero. And in the spring the creeks and rivers overflowed, and the whole land was covered with water.

That was enough for Thomas Lincoln, Squire Hall and Dennis Hanks. Packing up

their wives, children and furniture, they started back east in the spring of 1831. Retracing their steps of the year before, they came to Coles County. Tradition has it that the Sawyers of Coles County (relatives of Mrs. Sarah Lincoln) persuaded the party to stop and try that neighborhood. So Thomas "squatted" on a 40-acre tract of land in the so-called Buck Grove neighborhood, which is near the northwest corner of the present Pleasant Grove township. Probably unable at first to make up his mind to stay in Illinois, he remained on this piece of land until the spring of 1834.

Abraham Lincoln did not go with his father to Coles County at this time. With two other men he took a flat boat down to New Orleans for Denton Offut, carrying a load of provisions. Down the Sangamon, via the Illinois, and on to the Mississippi, they made a successful trip. Abe then did go to Coles County to see his family before settling down in New Salem, Illinois, where he kept store for Denton Offut. He proved to be a good clerk.

Thomas Lincoln's age (53 years) when he arrived in Coles County, Illinois, obviously precluded any very active participation in the public affairs of the community. However, his stepson, John D. Johnston, served on two circuit court juries, and also was a constable for eight years. Dennis Hanks, son-in-law of Mrs. Sarah

Lincoln, served on nine juries. He had political ambitions, but was unsuccessful three times as candidate for the office of Recorder.

Thomas Lincoln was a party to six law suits in Coles County. His stepson, John D. Johnston, was also involved in four of them and, knowing from Johnston's correspondence with Abraham Lincoln (now in the Robert Todd Lincoln collection in the Congressional Library) that he was irresponsible to say the least, one is tempted to assume that the basis for much of Thomas' financial embarrassment was his willingness to sign notes with Johnston. When Johnston failed to pay, the liability fell on Thomas. These law suits are all dated within a nine year period when Johnston's family, and of course his obligations, were growing rapidly. A case in point is the suit regarding a mill for which Thomas Lincoln, John D. Johnston, Dennis Hanks, Squire Hall, and one William Moffett signed a lease in 1835 by which they were obligated to pay \$220.12½ at the end of a year. When the year was up only \$85.25 had been paid, and of that \$50 was accounted for by repairs to the mill (repairs by carpenter Lincoln?) Three months later, the owners brought suit and won a judgment of \$138.67 from Lincoln, Johnston, Hanks and Hall (Moffett having disappeared).

The story of Thomas Lincoln's land transactions is more cheerful. We have already seen that he "squatted" on the Buck Grove farm from the time he came to Coles County in 1831 until 1834. Between 1834 and 1837 he bought 200 acres of land in three separate deals in Coles County for a total of \$275.00. In 1837 he sold 120 acres of this land in two separate deals for a total of \$362.50. This was pretty good trading. Not only did he make a cash profit of \$87.50 but he owned, free and clear, the 80 acre farm in Goose Nest Prairie on which he lived.

The story of the "Abraham forty" is as follows: In 1840 Thomas bought for \$50 forty acres of land adjoining his Goose Nest Prairie farm on the east. In 1841, his son Abraham, gave him \$200 for this 40-acre tract, and took a deed for it, stipulating in the deed that Thomas and his wife Sarah should have a life interest in it—thus insuring his father and mother a home as long as they should live. Abraham was well aware of Thomas' generosity and of his stepbrother John's improvidence.

In making his four land purchases in Coles County, Thomas had to resort to a mortgage in only two cases: he borrowed \$102 in 1834 on the 80-acre "Plummer Place" which was repaid in 1838, after he had sold it to Daniel P. Needham. In 1842 he borrowed \$50 on the east 40 acres of

his 80-acre farm. The records do not show when this was repaid. Thomas Lincoln's land deals apparently were made for the purpose of acquiring a home for himself and his wife Sarah for their old age, and in this he succeeded. He left no unpaid debts or taxes in either Kentucky or in Indiana, nor in Illinois did Thomas Lincoln's name appear on any delinquent tax list, nor is there any record of unpaid debts or judgments. And he **did** farm his land. In a letter to his son in 1848 he said: "We have razed this summer as much as 50 bushels of corne to the acar, and our wheat was very good."

That Abraham Lincoln, a rising young lawyer in Springfield, should occasionally help his father was only natural. We have a record of four cases of financial assistance:

- (1) The \$200 he gave his father for the "Abraham forty"
- (2) The assignment of a \$35 legal fee to his father in the case of Thomas McKibben vs. Jonathan Hart, trial held at Charleston
- (3) The assignment of four legal fees in the cases of Levi Watson vs. James Gill, Robert Matson vs. Hiram Rutherford, and two others
- (4) Thomas asked Abraham for \$20 in 1848 when Abraham was a Member of Congress at Washington; and received it

There is a tradition in the Sawyer family

that Abraham sent his stepmother ten dollars a month. A. H. Chapman said that Lincoln gave his mother \$50 when in Charleston for the Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858. Jesse Weik, Herndon's co-author, reported that Lincoln left his stepmother "a generous sum of money to lighten the burden of her declining years and thus insure her every comfort" when he last came to see her in 1861. There was probably a great deal of assistance personally and through correspondence, of which now there is no trace.

It is known that Abraham Lincoln was in Charleston of Coles County at least sixteen times during the years his father lived there—1831 to 1851. It is tradition that, when Abe's business in Charleston was finished, he would fill up a rented or borrowed buggy with good things for the folks at Goose Nest Prairie, and drive the eight miles to see them. We are fairly certain, too, that the father never visited the son, either in New Salem nor in Springfield, not even after Abraham was living in a house of his own, beginning in May, 1844. Mrs. Abraham Lincoln never met either Thomas or Sarah. The 100 miles between Charleston and Springfield was a great distance to Thomas and Sarah because it had to be made in a buggy as the railroad did not come to Coles County until after Thomas' death. Nor did Thomas ever see his son's children: Robert, Eddie

and Willie. However, the Abraham Lincoln's fourth son, born in 1853, was named after Thomas. The only other known contact between the two families was the visit to Springfield, lasting a year and a half, of Mrs. Sarah Lincoln's granddaughter Harriet Hanks (her mother was Elizabeth Johnston Hanks) which began in 1844.

Nothing is really known of Thomas Lincoln's education. He could sign his name, there being sixteen signatures surviving on documents. Sometimes he signed by mark. Sarah Bush Lincoln said Tom could sign his name and read a little, but she could do neither. Mrs. Nancy Lincoln had even less schooling than her husband, and had to sign by mark.

Thomas Lincoln died January 17, 1851. Five days before he died Abraham wrote to his stepbrother that, because Mary had just had another baby and was still in bed, he could not come, but he said:

I sincerely hope that Father may yet recover his health; but at all events tell him to call upon, and confide in our great and good and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity . . . Say to him . . . if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before; and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere-long to join them.

This letter throws an interesting light on Abraham's own ideas of immortality. Sarah Lincoln died in 1869, and Thomas and Sarah are buried in the Shiloh or Gordon cemetery, a mile and a half west of their Goose Nest Prairie home.

Beveridge says there is unanimous and positive testimony as to the placid character of Thomas Lincoln. Dennis Hanks described him as "a good humored, sociable man who took the world easy, loving everybody and everything". David C. Mearns in his **The Lincoln Papers** says that one William Green described Thomas as the "cleverest homespun man I ever saw" and that "he could tell more good anecdotes than his son Abraham". There is a story extant that Thomas was grubbing up bushes on his farm, and a neighbor said to him, "I thought you told me that you wanted to sell your farm?" Thomas replied, "And so I do, but I haint agoin' to let my farm know it". Mrs. Sarah Lincoln has testified that he was kind and loving, always paid his way, and never turned a dog from his door. A neighbor, Mrs. Andrew Allison, said of Thomas Lincoln: "A harder working man than Thomas Lincoln never lived, but he was a poor manager". C. H. Coleman in his book **Abraham Lincoln and Coles County, Illinois** is inclined to agree with an estimate of Thomas Lincoln made by Sarah's granddaughter, Mrs. Sarah Jane Dowling.

She told in an interview that:

Thomas Lincoln made a good living and I reckon he would have got something ahead if he hadn't been so generous. He had the old Virginia notion of hospitality, liked to see people sit up to the table and eat hearty, and there were always plenty of his relatives and Grandmother's willing to live on him. Uncle Abe got his honesty and his clean notions of living and his kind heart from his father.

In Coles County tradition has it that he worked as a carpenter when farm work was slack. He is said to have assisted David Dryden in the building of a frame house, and also worked with Dryden in his black smith shop.

Thomas Lincoln was an honest man, and a temperate one. He differed little from his neighbors in Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois. His sole claim to our attention is because of his son.

LINCOLN LOG CABIN STATE PARK

Coles County, Illinois

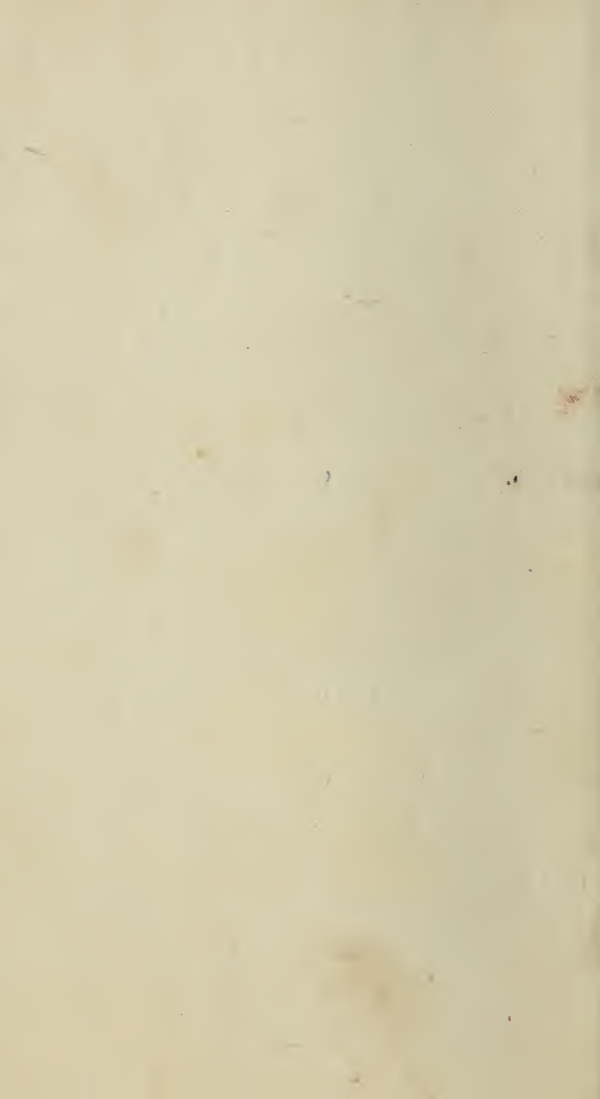
This was the home of Thomas and Sarah Bush Lincoln, father and stepmother of Abraham Lincoln. The Park was dedicated in 1936. The cabin is an accurate reproduction of the original, which disappeared after being exhibited at the Chicago

World's Fair in 1893. The east part of the double cabin probably was built in 1837 by Thomas Lincoln and his stepson, John D. Johnston, on the 40 acres east of the present location. In 1840 Thomas Lincoln acquired his 80-acre farm (now included in the 86-acre State Park) from Reuben Moore, a neighbor. He built a new cabin, and moved the earlier cabin to it to make a double cabin. He lived here with his wife, Sarah, until his death.

Abraham Lincoln's last visit to Coles County was on January 31, 1861, when he came to say good-bye to his stepmother before leaving Illinois for Washington and the White House. Mrs. Lincoln at that time was staying with her daughter, Mrs. Matilda Moore, at the nearby village of Farmington or Campbell. The neighbors entertained Abraham Lincoln at this time with a big dinner in the Moore House. This house is owned by the State of Illinois, and is open to the public on week ends during the tourist season.

*Lincoln Log Cabin
State Park*





UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA

973.7L63C2C677T C001
THOMAS LINCOLN CHARLESTON, ILL.?



3 0112 031802033